San Antonio Missions

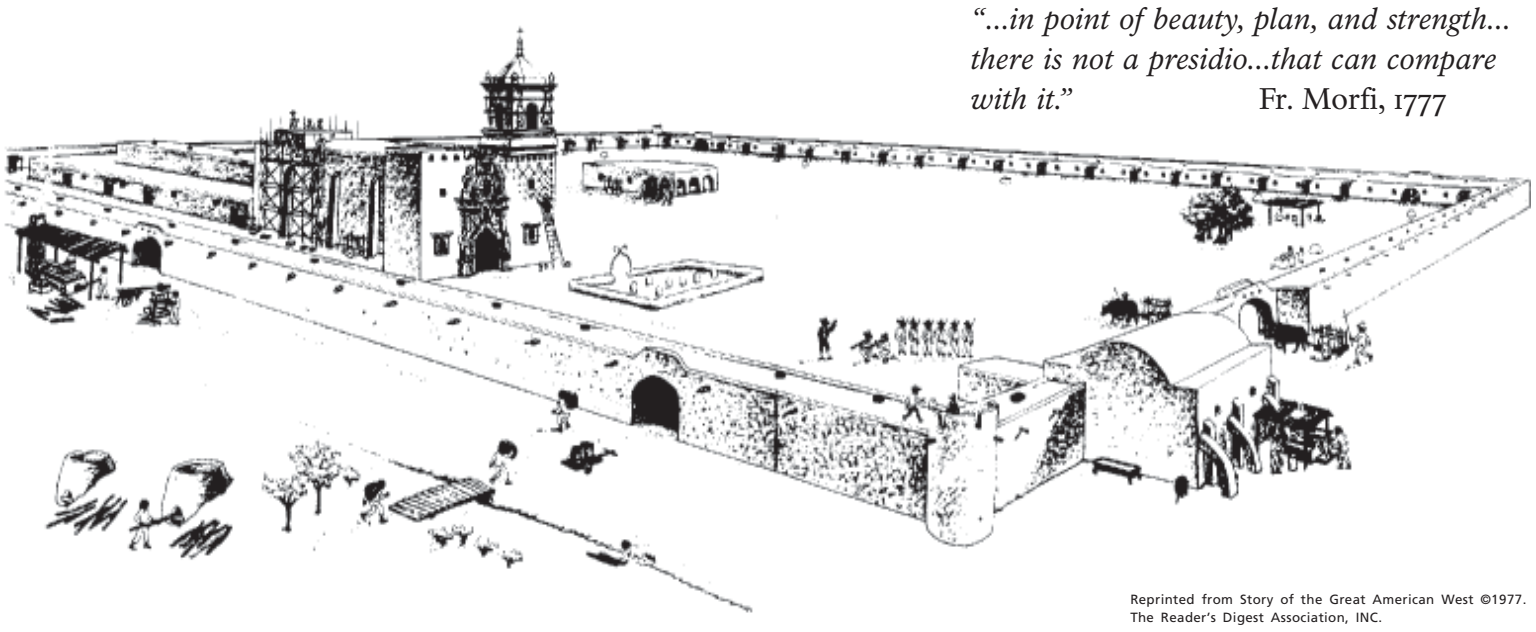
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

San Antonio Missions
National Historical Park

Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo

English

"...in point of beauty, plan, and strength... there is not a presidio...that can compare with it." Fr. Morfi, 1777



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Founding the "Queen of the Missions"

In 1719, Father Margil de Jesús, a seasoned Franciscan missionary, was at Mission San Antonio de Valero (today's Alamo), awaiting the opportunity to re-establish missions in east Texas. Before too long, he saw need for another mission and wrote the Marqués de Aguayo, then governor of the Province of Coahuila and Texas, requesting permission to establish a second mission south of San Antonio de Valero. He felt he was prepared to establish this mission at once as he had necessary church goods with him, even a statue of Saint Joseph.

The Marqués agreed and founding ceremonies took place on February 23, 1720. Leaders of the three Indian bands were appointed governor, judge, and sheriff in the new mission community of San José y San Miguel de Aguayo. Father Margil entrusted the care of the project to Father Núñez and two soldiers.

The building of the limestone church, with its extraordinary Spanish colonial Baroque architecture and statuary began in 1768— the peak of this mission's development. At that time there were 350 Indians residing in 84 two-room apartments. Based on Father Morfi's description of what he saw here when he visited in 1777, Mission San José came to be known as the "Queen of the Missions."

A Day at Mission San José in 1778

The Franciscan friars objective was to convert indigenous hunters and gatherers into Catholic, tax-paying citizens of New Spain. The Indians' struggle for survival against European disease and raiding Lipan Apaches led them to the missions and to forfeit their culture. Everything changed for them: diet, clothing, religion, culture—even their names. They were required to learn two new languages, Latin and Spanish, as well as new vocations.

Their new roles and duties in the mission were very regimented. Church bells called them to mass three times a day. Following sunrise mass, families returned to their two-room quarters for corn *atole* (mush) and *charque* (jerky). After breakfast, the men and boys worked in the *labores* (fields), and in textile, tailor, carpenter, and blacksmith shops. They also worked as masons, weavers, *acequia* (irrigation ditch) builders, and at the lime kilns. Some took charge of the livestock at the mission's ranch, El Atascoso, about 25 miles southwest of the mission.

The women and girls prepared food, swept the dirt floors, carded wool, and fished in the irrigation ditch outside the walls. Father Ramírez gave the Indian children religious instruction. Spanish and Indian mission officials met in the plaza to discuss community affairs. The bells rang out at noon, calling everyone back to the church for prayers. The main meal of the day was lunch, perhaps a bowl of goat stew and fresh baked tortillas. The afternoon siesta followed the meal and most activity subsided for several hours. Mounted Indian sentinels, however, continually kept guard outside the walls.

Summoned by the bells, everyone returned to the church for evening worship. After supper, recreational time for singing, games, dances, storytelling, and drama filled the evening. At dark, all retired to their raised beds of buffalo hides. The next work day began at sunrise as the mission Indians were again called by the bells into the church for mass.

A Community Continues

On February 29, 1824, Mission San José ceased to be a mission. It was fully secularized that day when Father Díaz complied with Mexican government orders and turned the church property over to Chaplain Maynes and the mission Indians living here. After secularization, the mission was neglected. In the years following, Benedictines, Redemptorists, and Holy Cross Fathers ministered from the ruins. In 1931, the Franciscans returned and still live here today.

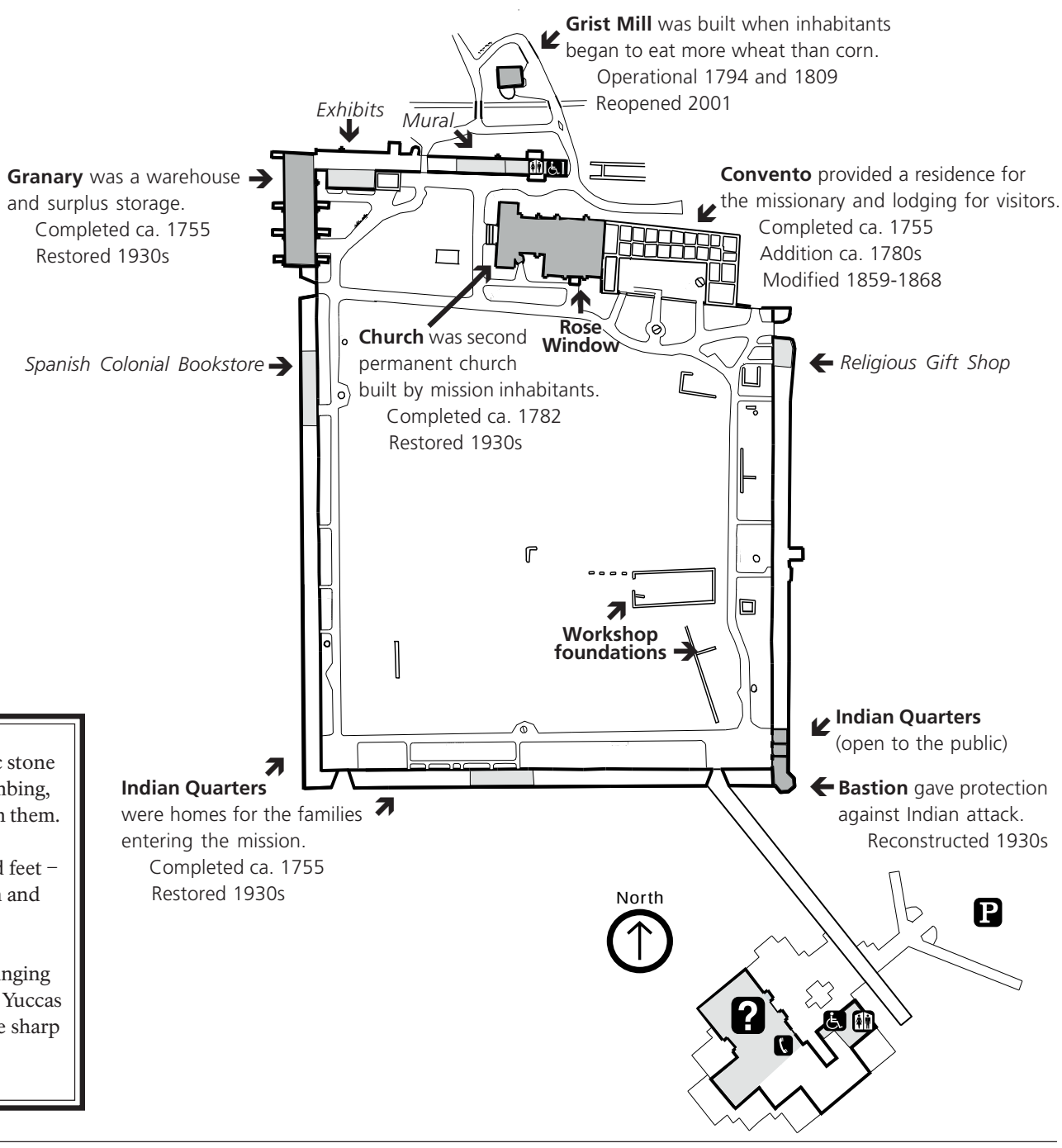
The 104 years that San José operated as a mission, over 2,000 Indians were baptized. Today, families that worship at Mission San José continue in the faith taught to the mission Indians. Many hearts and hands have restored this "Queen of the Missions". Today, the National Park Service preserves and protects the living heritage of the people transformed here and the stone structures they built. This ensures that future generations may visit these same walls and see how the past has shaped the present. The colorful pageantry of culture, art, food, celebrations, and architecture we enjoy in San Antonio today emerged from the blending of Spanish and Indian traditions that took place here at Mission San José.

The Rose Window or Rosa's Window?

The Rose Window is known as the premier example of Spanish Colonial ornamentation in the United States. Its sculptor and significance continue to be a mystery. Folklore credits Pedro Huizar, a carpenter and surveyor from Mexico, with carving the famous window as a monument to his sweetheart, Rosa. Tragically, on her way from Spain to join him, Rosa was lost at sea. Pedro then completed the window as a declaration of enduring love.

A less colorful theory, but more likely, is that the window was named after Saint Rose of Lima, the first saint of the New World.

Mission San José Today



Protect these historic stone structures by not climbing, standing, or sitting on them.

Watch your head and feet – walkways are uneven and doorways are low.

Fireants and other stinging insects are common. Yuccas and other plants have sharp points.